



Testimony of  
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Labor and Public Employees Committee  
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***SB 358 An Act Concerning Employee Voting Opportunities***  
***SB 881 An Act Establishing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program***  
***SB 1004 An Act Concerning Public Insurance Options for Small Business Employees***  
***HB 7292 An Act Concerning Social Worker Title Protection***

Good afternoon Representative Porter, Senator Kushner and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Sal Luciano and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 220,000 members in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state, and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on a number of bills impacting working families.

**SB 358 An Act Concerning Employee Voting Opportunities: SUPPORT**

The United States has one of the lowest voter participation rates in the developed world. One of the most common reasons people give for not voting is that they're too busy juggling the responsibilities of work and family. Well-intentioned employees, who may attempt to vote before or after work, are not always able to cast a ballot. Voter turnout, weather, traffic, public transportation issues and other variables can make Election Day an especially-chaotic workday. In order to ensure employees exercise their constitutional rights to vote and meet work and family obligations, SB 358 proposes a remedy that a majority of other states have already adopted – voting leave.

Federal law does not require employers to provide employees time off to cast their ballots, but majority of states have at least some level of protection for employees who want to leave work to engage in their civic duty. The specifics vary by state, but in each state, the rules apply to almost every type of workplace.

Connecticut is one of only seventeen states that do not provide any kind of protection for employees who want to exercise their franchise. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

**SB 881 An Act Establishing A Paid Family and Medical Leave Program: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Nearly every employee has struggled to balance family and work responsibilities, but there are occasions when it is impossible juggle both at the same time. When a worker or a family member becomes seriously ill or a new child is welcomed into the family, federal FMLA law provides unpaid leave with job protection, but most workers simply cannot afford to take it.

We applaud Governor Lamont for making the establishment of paid family and medical leave a priority for his administration and thank him for proposing SB 881. While the Connecticut AFL-CIO largely supports this bill, Connecticut workers and their families have waited long enough for accessible and affordable paid

family and medical leave. We urge the Committee to amend this bill to ensure that it is inclusive and accessible to all Connecticut workers:

- ***Expand the Definition of Family***

A paid leave program should cover all workers, regardless of who they care for or depend on for care. This is especially important to aging, baby boomer members of the LGBTQ+ community who, due to societal or cultural reasons, are often unable to turn to their blood relatives for care. SB 881 expands on the federal FMLA's definition of family and adds care for a sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or child of any age, but it does not include care for chosen family as provided in SB1 and HB 5003. We urge the Committee to expand the definition of family in SB 881.

- ***Provide Meaningful Wage Replacement***

Low-wage workers are least likely to have access to paid leave. They need to be eligible to receive the highest wage replacement benefit possible so they don't fall into poverty when they need to take care of themselves or their families. S.B. 881 provides workers with 90% of base weekly earnings, up to 40 times the minimum wage (around \$400/week), and 67% of their weekly earnings above that, up to a cap of 60 times the minimum wage (around \$600/week). This is insufficient. We urge the Committee to replace this language with the provisions of SB 1 and HB 5003, which provide workers with 100% of their weekly earnings, up to \$1,000 per week.

- ***Establish a Publicly Administered Plan***

Effective paid family and medical leave programs must be transparent, cost-effective and publicly accountable. Evidence from other state programs demonstrates that privately-run plans are not cheaper than publicly-run plans, in part because they incur increased costs associated with administrative oversight and regulations.

SB 881 allows employers to apply to the administrator for approval to meet the obligations of PFML through a private plan. This is a duplicative and expensive proposal that is unnecessary. We urge the Committee to remove this section.

SB 881 also designates the Department of Labor "or such quasi-public agency" to administer the program. The public trust of quasi-public agencies in Connecticut has been appropriately questioned. Quasi-public agencies are a step removed from taxpayers and are not often held to the same level of account as a traditional state agency. Many have struggled with issues of transparency, compliance, oversight and responsiveness. We urge the Committee to remove "or such quasi- public agency, as defined in section 1-121 of the general statutes, as the Labor Commissioner may designate" in Section 1 (2) of the bill.

#### **SB 1004 An Act Concerning Public Insurance Options for Small Business Employees: SUPPORT**

I am proud to have been one of the original architects of the Healthcare Partnership Program. The intention was to use the state's buying power of to provide high quality health care to municipal employees at an affordable price. While I am disappointed that far too many cities and towns place more value on the personal relationships with their brokers than premiums, care or outcomes, I am optimistic that municipalities will eventually come around and take advantage of this benefit. I am delighted that small businesses and small business employees would like the same opportunity and I support SB 1004.

This bill provides a prudent, reasonable and voluntary process to allow small businesses and their employees to access the state's health care plan, offering affordable and quality health care to private-sector workers. Health care purchasing is based on volume. The state health plan covers nearly 200,000 public sector workers and their families. That kind of leverage yields significant savings small businesses could never achieve alone.

Allowing small businesses to purchase health care pooled with the state employee plan allows them to look after their workers, but it also provides a significant financial advantage. They will see reductions in administrative costs and realize savings related to worker retention. Workers who have access to good employer-sponsored health care are more likely to remain in their jobs, reducing training costs and recruitment costs for employers. Employers can then focus on growing their businesses and raising wages, both of which improve the state's overall economy. I urge the Committee to support this bill.

**HB 7292 An Act Concerning Social Worker Title Protection: OPPOSE**

This well-intentioned bill does not distinguish between social workers trained and working in state service and social workers who are academically trained. Both make significant, positive contributions to our society. We respectfully request the Committee to exempt state employees from the provisions of HB 7292.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.